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The Soviet Republic

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YOU cannot solve the Russian problem by emotionalism. You cannot explain the situation there by passion. You cannot settle it by denunciation. You cannot understand Russia by saying that this man did so and so and another did so and so, and if these men had not done so or had not been there everything would be different. The Russian problem is not so simple as that, because it is a sociological problem.

I shall confine myself to pointing out just one outstanding economic fact in this sociological problem—namely, the land question. That has been the fundamental question in Russia for years and years. The peasants have made attempts to confiscate the land in Russia many, many times before the Soviet revolution. The peasants never had enough land. The Czar's government was too reactionary to present a solution of the land question even in such forms as have been accepted by so-called liberal capitalism in Western Europe. I refer to such solutions as, for example, were reached in the Irish land question, where the landlords were bought out and the Irish peasants were placed in a position where they somehow could buy on installment payments that little patch of land they got. The Czar's government was too reactionary to offer even such a solution. It stuck stubbornly to the old order for years and years. And when the day struck, when the peasants were in full physical control of the country, it was too late to offer such solutions. The peasants needed too much land and the finances of Russia were too disrupted to allow arrangements which would have been acceptable to capitalistic conceptions of society. If the land they took had been bought, it would have required tens of billions of roubles, financing of a kind which Russia was unable to do, even if she had wanted at that time. When the revolution came, the army which had been the chief weapon for keeping the peasants down, became the chief weapon in the hands of the peasants themselves.

And so the peasants just took the land. Whether you approve of it or not, it doesn't matter because you can't change it any more than you can change the course of the sun or the moon. It was, as diplomats say, a *fait accompli*, which could not be undone.

The Kerensky government fell because it had not courage enough to deal with this fact as an accomplished fact. Nor did it dare to stand for the consequences of this fact. Yet just naturally many other things resulted therefrom. If you annul the property rights on millions of acres of land, you thereby strike a death blow at the very foundations of capitalistic finance. Land is usually mortgaged. The value of papers in banks ultimately rests on land value. If you annul the mortgages, the banks are bankrupted. The bankruptcy of the banks will influence industrial and commercial life as a whole.

There were several theoretically possible courses to take to prevent such an outcome. One would have been to suppress the peasants. That could not be done because the peasants refused to allow themselves to be used to suppress themselves. Another proposition—one which is being carried out in Russia even now, although with very little success—was to get somebody else to suppress the peasants. Kolchak is trying to gather around him various armies of semi-savage nomadic tribes, such as Kalmyks, Bashkirs, etc., who have no interest in the land question, with a sprinkling of old régime officers. They are, however, not numerous enough to suppress that vast number of peasants. Then the Russian autocracy proposes another solution. They would like to have your boys come over there and suppress the Russian peasants. There has been some opposition among you to that proposition.

If there had been no Communist party in Russia at the time of the March revolution, one would have been created to cope with the issues presented by the nationalization of land. The Bolsheviks are in power because they had courage enough to stand by that issue and to pursue a policy which was necessary. The fact that they, as Socialists, were particularly interested in following such a program made them particularly fitted to take upon themselves the consequences of the nationalization of land. Those consequences were the nationalization of banks, industry and so on, as far as it has been necessary and advantageous.

It is said that Russia is chaotic. This is true to a certain extent, but where do you not have chaos in the world today? You have chaos elsewhere than in Russia. Is there more chaos in Soviet Russia than there is in the rest of the world? There are many conflicting reports upon it. I shall, however, call attention to the testimony of a man who cannot be accused of bias toward bolshevism, Mr. Allen White, who was selected by the President of the United States to be one of the representatives at the Princes Island Conference, which never took place. He writes in the *New York World* of April 27, 1919, that the Soviet government of Russia is the only stable government on the European Continent east of the Rhine. Mr. Fred Hunt, quite a conservative correspondent of the *Chicago Tribune*, who is now in Soviet Russia, wires to his paper that there is more order in Soviet Russia than he has seen for a long time anywhere in Europe. An exaggeration, some may say. Perhaps not. The average American public have certain notions about the Bolsheviki. They always mix anarchy and bolshevism all in one. Now the fact is that the Communist party, which is popularly called the Bolshevik party, is absolutely anti-anarchistic.

There is terror in Russia, it is said. Why, yes! But if you speak of the Russian Red Terror, which, according to official figures has taken by executions—or if you please, murders—about 3,000 lives during the past year, why don't you speak about other terror that exists in other places? In little Finland alone, where I come from, the anti-socialist forces, the so-called White Guard together with the Germans, after the civil war was over, deliberately executed 15,000 men and women, and deliberately starved 10,000 more to death within a period of a few months, and they admit it themselves. Kolchak boasts of the fact that, whenever he is able to get hold of a village or a town where the Bolsheviki have been in power, he executes "as bandits" all those who belonged to the Soviet government. His forces execute as murderers and looters all the prisoners they take.

If the Kolchaks ever will come into power in Russia, they will come into power over the bodies, not of three or four or five thousand, but over the bodies of five, six or seven hundred thousand men. You will have an orgy of bloodshed which you never have had in the world before. It will mean fighting in each and every

village in Russia; it will mean fighting in each and every house in Russia. Is it not clear that if the Kolchaks are to put down that organization of the workingmen which is established there, they will have bloodshed for years to come, and when that bloodshed is ended they will have, at all events, that which you have there today? If you countenance the terror, tenfold much more cruel and extensive, which is being perpetrated by the opponents of the Bolsheviki, is it not sheer hypocrisy to speak about the terror that is perpetrated by the Bolsheviki? Furthermore, out of the 3,000 persons executed in Soviet Russia during the past year, more than 50 per cent were executed for looting and for street robbery, for thievery, for dishonesty. The rest of them were executed because they were found red-handed with arms in their hands trying to overthrow the existing government in Russia and to murder their officials.

The Russian Soviet government is absolutely incapable of constructive action, we have been told. This is a question on which the American public is not in a position to pass judgment because they have been systematically prevented from getting news about the constructive work which is being done in Russia. A correspondent of an important news association, who by no means is a socialist, admitted to me himself that he left Russia not because the Bolsheviki drove him out, but because it was impossible for him to send dispatches, as some outside forces prevented him from sending them. He said that 95 per cent of all his telegrams were held up, and especially were such telegrams held up which said a single word about the constructive work that is being done in Russia. You get from Russia news purely of a negative character. Now if America were cut away from the rest of the world and somebody outside of America would take upon himself to distribute through the cables any silly, foolish thing which might have been done by some individual, or might not, and news of everything else were prevented from coming out, what do you think the people outside would believe?

We in Russia are very much in that position. If space allowed, I could present official statistics of the industrial departments of the Russian Soviet government, which would prove that in spite of tremendous obstacles the Russian industries are running and that their output has been steadily increasing since April, 1918.

The educational system in Russia has been reorganized on an extensive basis, unheard of in Russia before; tens of thousands of new schools have been established; and treasures of art and music, which never reached the people before, are now at the asking of anybody in Russia.

There is one thing I desire to avoid more than anything else—exaggeration. I do not wish to state that in Russia there are idealistic conditions. How could there be? But I ask if any country in the world—excepting perhaps the United States, which is economically self-sustaining—if any country were economically cut off from the rest of the world for seventeen months, as Russia has been, what would happen to its economic life? Russia always depended for imports on abroad. How can she be expected, after five years of war and revolution, to have ideal economic conditions with the world deliberately keeping away from her every screw, every nail, every little cog-wheel of a machine, every little thing which every civilized country may need?

I admit, and by admitting it I am expressing thoughts of our people in Russia, that the Soviet government can succeed only in as far as it is economically sound. We know that we can maintain our power and the structure of society which is in Russia today only in as far as we are able to deal with the realities of life. We are ready to take upon ourselves the responsibility of responsible relations with other countries. We know that we will not succeed unless we can prove that the system we represent in Russia, under given conditions, is economically the most efficient.

We have been accused of attempting to “bribe the American business men” by promising them \$200,000,000. It has been said that we are playing on the avidity of the American business man and that some of the American business men have fallen for our charms. Now, although I am a bolshevist, I shall not be so discourteous toward the American business man. I shall not accuse him of individual avidity. Yet I want to state that in spite of the vilification directed against us, and in spite of all warnings issued, there are more than 1,500 responsible manufacturers in the United States today who have in black and white expressed their desire to enter into trade relations with Soviet Russia at once without hesitation. I do not ascribe this to their avidity. I ascribe it to their common sense.

You cannot isolate the world in the way it has been isolated up to now. You may do so, perhaps, for a year or two, but isolation of this kind is a boomerang in the final account. It will hurt you as well as it will hurt us.

There is just one thing we are asking for: Trade relations and cessation of intervention.

It has been said that if the Allied troops were withdrawn from Russia there would be a general massacre of all those in favor of intervention. This story has been printed hundreds of times, but not one of the big American newspapers has ever printed the fact that the Russian government has repeatedly offered to give absolute amnesty to everyone who has participated in any struggle against it. The Russians are not out for scalps for the sake of scalps.

I don't ask you to love us. I don't ask you to do away with your prejudices against the theories we represent. Why should I? I will not attempt to tell you that we are in accord with your ideals. I would be a hypocrite if I did so. We represent there a different social order. But it is our business, not yours.

There is too much insincerity in the world diplomacy today. Mr. Lloyd George said, in his speech before the Commons, that he never heard about the peace proposition that Lenin had sent with Mr. Bullitt from Moscow to Paris. Yet a New York magazine says that Mr. Lloyd George had lunch with Mr. Bullitt the very day after Mr. Bullitt returned from Moscow. Now, Mr. Lloyd George was formally right. He never received an official presentation of that document. No one came to him, clad in the official garb of a diplomatic servant with the usual formula, "I hereby have the honor to present to your Excellency this and that." Yet he knew all about it. Is it not time to do away with that insincere hypocritical structure of diplomatic formalities that has been built up during hundreds of years? It may be in itself a funny thing, if you have enough sense of humor to sense it, but it becomes a criminal tragedy when such formalities stand in the way of sensible people getting together and talking common sense in order to stop murder and starvation.